RUTH VAN KEUREN SAKAI

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Ruth Van Keuren Sakai

(1893 -)

Mrs. Sakai, a retired public health nurse, first came to Hawaii in 1920 from Kansas after spending a year in France working with a medical unit during World War I. In 1923, having returned to Kansas for a year, she came back to Hawaii, married, had a child, then began a twenty-year career as the public health nurse for Kohala on the Big Island from 1929 to 1949.

She was born in Baldwin City, Kansas where she attended public schools and graduated from high school. She then went to Kansas City to receive her nurse's training at the Swedish Hospital, completing the course in 1915. She continued nursing at the Swedish Hospital until 1918 when she accompanied a medical unit recruited to serve in France. Following the armistice, she worked in an evacuation hospital in Bordeaux until May 1919.

In this interview, Mrs. Sakai talks about her nursing experiences and some of the problems encountered in the field of public health.

Lynda Mair, Interviewer

INTERVIEW WITH RUTH VAN KEUREN SAKAI

(MRS. KINICHI SAKAI)

At her Pohai Nani apartment, 45-090 Namoku Street, Kaneohe 96744

In late 1971

S: Ruth Van Keuren Sakai

M: Lynda Mair, Interviewer

S: Start out with my beginnings, huh?

M: Yeh, like . . .

S: How I got down here?

M: . . . where you were born, to begin with.

S: Yeh. Well, I was born in Kansas.

M: What part of Kansas?

S: Oh, fifty miles from Kansas City--Baldwin [City], Kansas.

M: Was that out in the farm land?

S: No. The fact is it's a small college town that I was born and brought up in.

M: And what were your parents' names?

S: Oh, my father was Lee Seth Van Keuren.

M: You'll have to spell that for me.

S: Yeh. Well, you can get the Van. K-E-U-R-E-N.

M: Now say the whole thing again 'cause I'm just really . . .

S: Well, he was Lee Seth--L.S.--Van Keuren.

M: Start from the beginning and let's spell it. (she spells it) Oh, S-E-T-H and Lee are all one name.

S: No, that's his two first names--L.S., then Van Keuren. K-E-U-R-E-N. Extra letter in it than some others in the family, but that's the way he spelled his name. My mother was Mary Van Keuren.

M: What nationality is that name?

S: Van Keuren?

M: Um hm.

S: Holland-Dutch, I think. Though the family had been here for so many generations before my father was born, he didn't know much about it.

M: Hmm. Just a kind of an unusual name.

S: Van Keuren?

M: Yes, uh huh. Did your father teach at the college? Is that . . .

S: Oh no, oh no. My father was a telegraph operator with the railroad. Worked for the Santa Fe Railroad.

M: Did you go to school in this little town?

S: I graduated from high school there and then I went to Kansas City--at that time the hospital was the Swedish Hospital--to take my nurse's training there.

M: Was that the name of the school, Swedish Hospital?

S: Yes, Swedish Hospital. It's Twinview Lutheran [Hospital] now, still there. (recorder turned off and on again)

M: Okay. How did you happen to decide on nursing?

S: I don't know. I don't really remember anymore. But I never wanted to be, say, a schoolteacher or something else and I was hipped on nursing without. . . . When I went to training was the first time I ever saw the inside of a hospital. I was so surprised to see the beds so high and all (laughter) things like that. And I'd never, for instance, seen a bedpan or any of those things. It was all new to me but that's been what I wanted to do.

Everybody tried to dissuade me. All the things--I was going to have to bathe a nigger and men and all kinds of things. But I was determined; don't ask me why. I guess it might have gone back to an illness I had when I was twelve. I didn't go to the hospital; I just liked

the doctor. They cured me. If you ever mention nursing or anything, I don't remember it. But that's all in my youth that I could think of that started me that way. I was certainly that way all through high school. I wanted to be a nurse so away I went to Kansas City; became a nurse.

M: Was that your first time away from home?

S: Oh yes.

M: In the big city on your own?

S: Uh huh. Well, we had friends up there. It wasn't too far--only fifty miles. Seemed a long way because we had to change trains to go up there. In those days, of course, there weren't any cars or anything.

Then by the time I got through there, they were fighting in Europe already [World War I]. And . . .

M: That was about when did you finish nursing school?

S: Nineteen fifteen [1915]. So I kept right on nursing there but we signed up a unit. A Dr. Benney, who was a famous surgeon there in Kansas City, recruited a unit--a hundred nurses and I forget how many corpsmen and how many doctors. They were all [from] Kansas City.

It was 1918, though, before they called us and we went to France. We were over there about a year because they brought a lot of the doctors back soon after the armistice. They kept nurses over there, though, for fear there was going to be another flu epidemic like there'd been the year before and they'd just have to turn boats around and send us back, so they thinned out sick nurses and that sort of thing and sent them home.

But it was slow evacuating all of our wounded and ill. So many of our boys had gotten tuberculosis when they had the flu, you see, over there and so we had more than just wounded to bring home. I worked down in Bordeaux then, after the war was over, in an evacuation hospital and . . .

M: Must have been quite an experience.

S: Yes. So it was 1919 before I got home. We all said that we didn't know the war was over in the hospital till New Year's, you know, because it took that long to get the boys that were shot the last day in any condition to come home. So we had our big evacuation early in January. And then I came home in May. It was actually June before I got back to Kansas but I crossed the ocean coming home in May. Peculiar thing--just like boys from World War II, I

got itchy feet, and the next year I came to [Hawaii]. I'd loved Kansas City before and I couldn't stand it after that winter I spent there working in Kansas City, the winter of 1919, so three of us came down here in August of 1920--my sister [Helen Van Keuren Foss], who had a school-teaching job, and my nurse pal and myself came along with her. We told her she was going to have to send us back if we couldn't get jobs. (both chuckle) We both got jobs right away.

In October I went to Kohala. They asked me if I'd go to one of the outer islands and I said yes. They had a little plantation hospital over there that rated one nurse. Beautiful hospital. I wasn't there very long before I was calling it a high-class boardinghouse. Most of our patients were beriberi patients who only needed feeding and I . . .

M: Wait, slow down. I want to ask you a couple questions.

S: Yes?

M: Who did you contact when you first came to Honolulu for a job?

S: Oh, I had a letter from a doctor in Kansas City to Dr. [James Robert] Judd. Well, probably he told me about a Mrs. Ansell who kept nurses. She ran a sort of boarding-house but she . . .

M: Yeh, I know that lady very well.

S: Yes, it was nurses, it wasn't . . .

M: Or I knew of her.

S: So we went to her but she was full up so my friend and I got a little apartment up on the side of Punchbowl. But she had our telephone number and she gave us calls--both of us. And I just had one case here in Honolulu. Iolani School used to be right next to the governor's mansion, you know.

M: You don't mean Washington Place?

S: Yes.

M: Oh, it was?

S: Well, the Episcopal Church is right there [Saint Andrew's

Cathedral] . . .

M: Oh yeh.

S: . . . and Iolani is [an] Episcopal school. Oh, they've got what--Tenney Hall or something there now [on the grounds of the present Saint Andrew's Priory School]. But there was coral--white coral driveway went in and date palms on both sides, and these buildings on either side then were Iolani School.

One of the teachers that had been home for the summer came off the boat ill and I went in there and nursed her. That was my first case in Honolulu. Very crude because she'd caught malaria and we had no malaria here but we do have mosquitoes and mostly I was in there keeping the mosquitoes from biting her. (laughter) And we didn't have screened houses then; you had cotton net over the beds that you had to pull out and tuck in every time you wanted to do anything. But anyway, that was my first case.

And then the second time Mrs. Ansell called me she asked me if I wanted to go out of town to another island and, hoping that it would be Maui where my sister [Helen Van Keuren Foss] was, I said, "Sure." So she sent me to North Kohala. And I told you before that . . .

M: Who was the doctor administering it then?

S: The hospital in Kohala? Dr. Benjamin Bond, the [son] of the missionary [Reverend Elias] Bond over there. There was one other Japanese doctor, Imamura, also came to the hospital. There were five plantations at that time in Kohala and they'd all put together and had this one hospital. It was the old Eben Lows' home--the old Low home and Eben had been one of the boys from that home. Their big living room and dining room--big men's ward--and the bedrooms were some women's wards and things like that.

M: Is that Low spelled L-O-W?

S: Yes. It's an old family here.

M: Yeh. I just couldn't think of it.

S: Yeh. Well, I stayed there for two years.

M: And you were <u>the</u> nurse?

S: I was <u>the</u> nurse. I had two maids that couldn't read a thermometer; they couldn't carry a bedpan (Lynda laughs), couldn't tell which end to put under the patient. (laughter) And that's about all.

M: What was this beriberi you mentioned?

S: Oh.

M: What's the cause of that? I know it's a deficiency . . .

S: It's a dietary deficiency because they've lived on rice only.

M: Oh, I see. So these were Asian people that . . .

S: They were Filipinos--single Filipinos. When the Filipino has established himself well enough to plant a garden, he will immediately get some cuttings of a thing that grows into sort of a tree and they eat the leaves of that. And they loved fish and they would go fishing every Saturday and Sunday, you know. But bachelors wouldn't always do it. When they'd get that and get some of the melons or squashes or whatever you call them that they liked growing, why then their diet's all right.

But these were Filipino bachelors that had come over here on contract and all of them were sending nine-tenths of their money back to the Philippines and lived on a bag of rice. They'd buy a bag of rice every month. And the money for that was about all they kept, and for a few clothes. And just one after another would faint in the fields, then they'd send them in to the hospital.

So, oh I guess beriberi's eliminated now. In the time that I was there I think I had one Japanese patient. All the rest that had beriberi were Filipinos. And of course, we did have other cases because there were accidents every once in a while--somebody was getting cut by a cane knife or something like that--but not much of that. It was really beriberi that we took care of.

M: Yeh. What are some of the other symptoms [of beriberi]? Do they just get weak?

S: Yeh. And their ankles swell. I think, if I remember right, there's something in their gums or something affected too. Of course, they have hemorrhages and more if they're bad enough to die. But I never had but one die--let it go that far. These others were all up and around but I had one, one time. His legs were so swollen he couldn't get around and he did die. But he was one that had been way up in the mountains. He was working on the ditch instead of in the fields in the plantation. He was up there by one of the weirs--it was just a telephone--to his place and somebody'd take him a bag of rice every payday. And that's all he was eating, I guess. I don't think he ever went fishing or anything, though he should've been by a reser-

voir where he could've got freshwater fish. But anyway, I lost one patient in those two years.

M: Beriberi seems really exotic nowadays, doesn't it? (chuckles)

S: Yes.

M: I mean . . .

S: Yeh. Well, everybody knows better than to eat that kind of [food]. And in that day, I didn't know how to pronounce [the word] vitamins. I didn't know whether you should say vi-tamins or vit-amins. (laughter) Yes. When I took my training, there wasn't such an animal; hadn't been discovered. So I remember arguing with--the first time the school got a trained cafeteria manager. One of us showed up saying vi-tamins and the other, vit-amins. I don't know which one I was. (laughter) That was all new. That was between 1920 and '22, because I left there in '22.

M: Did you do anything with the schoolchildren while you were there?

S: Not in that capacity. I did later because then, after that, I went back home to make sure that I wanted to marry this Japanese boy and that I wanted to spend the rest of my life in Hawaii.

M: Oh, I see.

S: Because I was very sure he would not [relocate]. I couldn't take him home with me either. I had to live here. And it worked out that way. I came back in a year's time and married him and had a daughter [Joanne Van Keuren (Mrs. Eugene) McGinnis] and didn't work then from 1922 till '29. My daughter was on her feet and going and I found out I wasn't going to have any more [children]. So they badly needed a public health nurse in that district. They'd been having one after another and no single girl coming there would live there. [See p. 21]

M: Where was this? Was this . . .

S: North Kohala.

M: Oh, you came back there then. That's where your husband was from.

S: Yes, that's where my husband was from.

M: Did he work on a Kohala plantation?

S: No, he never worked on a plantation in his life. His father [James (Jim) Sakai] had a grocery store [Sakai Store].

M: Uh huh. Give me your husband's correct name.

S: Well, I always say Kinji, but I should say Kinichi. It's K-I-N-I-C-H-I.

M: Kinichi or Kenichi?

S: Kinichi. (spells it again) S-A-K-A-I.

M: So his father had a little store in the . . .

S: Yes.

M: . . . in the town there.

S: Yes. Not too far from the hospital. I used to walk over there and order the groceries.

M: And your husband was sort of . . .

S: Well, because I had to walk.

M: . . . assistant in the store then?

S: Yes, he was helping his father, uh huh. He went around and did the collections and got orders. He'd go away to outlaying camps and the women would give him their grocery orders. Then he'd come back home and then they'd send the truck out with the groceries once a month.

M: Well, was that the only store around?

S: No, no. Different plantations had their own stores.

M: Wait. (recorder turned off and on again) Right in Kohala itself, did the plantation have a store?

S: Well, as I said, there was five plantations and each had their own store because then people could buy anything they wanted and then at the end of the month they'd figure up what they owed them and pay what was left over, you know; that sort of thing. But still, every place all along the line there were little stores. Kohala's not very big, you see. It's that bump that sticks out on the north end of the Island of Hawaii and the [Route 27] road goes around the coastline. That road's only about fifteen

miles long and there was five plantations around there. Of course, now it's all one plantation but in those days, why, each different family had their own plantation.

M: Can you remember offhand what the names were?

S: Well, the [John] Halls had Nuli Plantation. [Niuli'i Mill and Plantation is mispronounced throughout.]

M: Nuli?

S: Yes. And [Dr. James] Wight had Halawa Plantation.

M: These are privately owned.

S: Well, not entirely but mostly.

M: They didn't belong to one of the factoring companies . . .

S: Well, they . . .

M: . . . at that time.

S: . . . tied up with a factor, of course, to sell their sugar.

M: Uh huh.

S: And the Bond family [Reverend Elias Bond, the original owner, and his son, Dr. Benjamin Bond] had the Kohala Sugar Company. The [James] Renton family had Union Mill [and Plantation, Limited]; and John Hind had Hawi [Mill and] Plantation.

M: That's Hind, H-I-N-D?

S: Yes.

M: Nuli was N-U-L-I, the way it sounds?

S: Nu-o-li-i. -L-I-I. [Discussion follows on pronunciation and spelling; Niuli'i is correct.]

M: Now, we got off on that. Now where were we? (laughter) Let's see. Then you went back to work in 1929.

S: In 1929 I went to work for the [Territory of Hawaii] Department of Health [as] a public health nurse.

M: Was that whole Kohala area your territory?

S: Yes, I had the whole Kohala area. Later on I had Kohala and Waimea, which is South Kohala--Parker Ranch. Well, the population wasn't so great.

M: Big area, though.

S: Yes, very big area.

M: How'd you get around then?

S: Oh, they always supplied me a car.

M: Oh, you had a car?

S: Yes, I always had the little T.H. [Territory of Hawaii] car.

They hadn't ever had maternal clinics. They'd had a few baby clinics. And, of course, they tried to check up on tuberculosis and crippled children, but it was right around '29 and soon after that they really established good clinics.

The TB doctor came from Honolulu at least once a year, once or twice a year, and saw cases. Kohala Hospital didn't have an X-ray machine. And at first when I was out there, if you ever did a skin test you had to send it clear to Honolulu [for the lab work]. But then Hilo got a laboratory established so that we could send specimens to Hilo and then we commenced to do better work, that's all. You couldn't do it before; you just didn't have any equipment.

Then Shrine Hospital [Shriner's Hospital for Crippled Children] got established down here and a Shrine Hospital doctor would come around once a month. I'd scour the hillsides and the valleys for cripples who were around the place and bring them in, and all that sort of thing started up.

But actually, the most dramatic thing, I think, that happened in the whole twenty years that I was working was the fact that we stopped diptheria. You see, in the tropics down here diptheria is not an epidemic. It's endemic. You can have it morning, noon or night, December or July or anytime.

M: You can have isolated cases of it.

S: Yes. Just here and there, sporadic cases.

M: Where they didn't have to catch it from another person, is that what you mean?

S: Well, they did. But we don't have any winter to kill any germs. (chuckles) And I'll tell you where it was hard on

us. It's babies under one year that die of diptheria the easiest. Of course, up till two years they die pretty easy but. . . . Say Kohala had not ever a high birthrate because we never had 10,000 people. I think the population was around 8,000 or something like that. And we'd have three infant deaths [due to diptheria] in one year. We had three infant deaths before 1929 and I don't think they've had one since. It was just miraculous; we just stopped it right there.

We went into the schools. And the school kids had taken home notes, of course, that Mama with all the babies was to come a certain day and we immunized everybody under twelve years old. And that was that. The whole twenty years I worked we had got diptheria germs in a boy about six or seven years old that was having repeated nosebleeds and it wasn't in his throat; it was in his nose. It was all from his nose that was cause of the diptheria.

But that was really dramatic. Because three infant deaths in Kohala where you hac maybe a hundred, but not ever over a hundred and twenty-five, babies born in one year. It just wrecked your mortality figures. And, of course, you have some stillborns and you have other causes of death. But you cut those diptheria deaths out and you've done something. So that was a really dramatic thing that I saw happen in public health.

M: Was that at the time when the vaccine was . . .

S: Yes.

M: . . . first discovered and . . .

S: Yes.

M: . . . developed?

S: Let me see. You got three shots, didn't you?

M: You do now.

S: Yeh.

M: Now they give the DPT [combination: diptheria, pertussis and tetanus]. (recorder turned off; counter at 424)

END OF SIDE 1/1ST TAPE

S: Well, I think it was with serum. Now you don't use anything that you get an allergic reaction out of. But this original diptheria immunization was done with a serum that was made up from horses; and then they could make it up

from, I believe, goats--something else. But anyway, after we'd given the first injections, our doctor wrote in and said, "I'm not going to give any more of this horse stuff." No, after the second injections, because the first injection would sensitize them and [after] the second injection the children would be sick. So they were getting some in that was not horse serum.

My own daughter never got but two injections. She was just laid flat from her second injection. We gave them in the side of the opu and her whole opu swelled up and it was just a mess.

M: Oh.

S: She had a very high temperature for several days but she wasn't the only one. There were lots of cases so the doctor just wrote and said, "I give no more of this horse serum." So they got a different serum there for a third injection. Well, now they've still improved it.

M: Oh yeh.

S: It's not a serum at all anymore, but that was that first time around.

M: What other kinds of experiences did you have so far as, you know, problems that you ran into or particular diseases or . . .

S: Well, towards the . . .

M: . . . dramatic incidents?

S: When I came in 1929 we were still finding leprosy here. I know one little schoolboy [who had it] I think by the time he was twelve or thirteen. The teacher was more akamai on that than I was. I had no ideas about leprosy. This boy had complained of an itchy back. I looked at it and I more than likely touched it, I don't know. I don't think I have any leprosy. (Lynda laughs) If ever I get a spot or something I always feel it, 'cause if you can feel it it isn't leprosy (chuckles) because leprosy comes in spots. You had to feel them. So I don't think I have it, but I think I've touched it in my day.

And they were awfully good. They had very good regulations about leprosy at that time, because one doctor never could say that a person was a leper. We got our suspicious cases and shipped them down here to Honolulu. I don't know if there's a receiving station now but the receiving station used to be way toward the sea, beside the jail down there. You go straight toward the ocean. It

was really a lovely little place down there. I went all through it. I never touched anything but I was taken through it because I had sent patients there.

One time I was down in Honolulu and I went down and saw one of them. And one of them wouldn't look at me. He was in bed and he hid his head because his face was so deformed. But a little girl that we'd sent down there was going to school. But her face looked fat and sixty--big nose and lips and lumps all over her face. So she'd gone very bad in a hurry. I understood she didn't live very long. Anyway, we had leprosy in Kohala after I was working there but I didn't ever see much of it, just a few cases.

M: Did you ever have any of the [bubonic] plague problem?

S: Well, the plague is strictly Honokaa's on our island. The plague is purely a rat-carried thing around there and the rats that--oh boy. Somebody tried to teach me ratis, ratis, ratis one time but I'd forgotten it. (laughter) But it's three kinds and the kind that had plague fleas don't come to Kohala. There's too many gulches; they don't get across all the streams.

They don't even get to Waimea because in 1942 or '43, whenever that was that they were starting to bring a division of Marines into Waimea to camps there, some of the doctors got very sharp because as far as I know that's the last human case we had in Honokaa. But they diagnosed a case in Honokaa.

M: Oh.

S: And of course it was easy enough for them to keep the boys out of Honokaa, not let them go that way for their time off. And they thought right away, "Oh, this was a big mistake." They'd spent all this money putting it up here and somebody got busy in the public health field and proved to them that the rat never came to Waimea either. (chuckles) And it never came to Kohala. So I think that's the way they kept it isolated there. How they ever got it out of Hilo and got it just centralized in Honokaa, I don't know. That was way before my time.

It had come into our island, of course, through Hilo because that was the only place where the boats tied up at that time. All the other boats that came were out [off shore], and stuff was put in small boats and rowed ashore and nearly always you could keep the rats from getting ashore that way. But I don't know. If they didn't [come in by way of Hilo], there was a place that loaded and unloaded off Honokaa, and if an infected rat came in through there or not I don't know. I can't tell you that, how it

got so that it's just isolated in Honokaa.

M: So you actually never saw a case of it then?

S: No, no, no. I never saw a case. No. Very few people have died while I was next door there. Two or three, maybe, in that twenty years. They'd find infected rats every once in a while but they didn't get human cases. The Honokaa people know how to keep rid of rats, keep away from them.

But the Board of Health had a very good setup there. They had a laboratory and they had more men there. They poisoned the rats and they had more employees that worked on it. Quite a thorough job.

M: Yeh. Because if they didn't get them, that's no joke, is it?

S: No. Hm um.

M: Do you mind if I was to have a cigarette?

S: Oh no. Here's an ashtray. Or there's one there, yeh.

M: Well, let's see. What can we go on to? I'm sure you must have other things that happened.

S: Not very much that was dramatic.

M: Well, maybe just talk about not anything particularly dramatic--the health problems that you had other than . . .

S: Well, of course I lived to see them get after polio too, but I was only a volunteer at that clinic. That was after I retired.

M: Oh.

S: Everybody had their sugar lumps (chuckles) with a drop of medicine on it.

M: So you worked through--what did you say? You worked for twenty years.

S: Yes, uh huh.

M: So that would have been 1949.

S: Yes.

M: And all of that time was as a public health nurse.

S: Yes, yes.

M: In the Kohala . . .

S: Yes, in North Kohala area. Well, of course, part of the time I had South Kohala district too. Both districts started losing population, then they divided the job up. Before that the Honokaa nurse had had Waimea, but Honokaa grew in population and Waimea and North Kohala went down in population, so they put those two areas together and that was my job.

M: Yeh, you said eight thousand people. I was talking to someone recently--I think it was my husband 'cause a lot of his family is from that area--and he said about twenty-five hundred people or something [are] now in the Kohala area, out North Kohala.

S: North Kohala. I thought it was four [thousand], but I don't know. Maybe it's down.

M: Well, much less than when you were there.

S: Yes. Well, one plantation [is all that's left], you see. My, we used to have a fancy dance club and everything because you had five plantation managers and five engineers and five chemists. And then they always had a haole head luna. Oh my, when I went there they had a haole stableman. One of the plantations was still hauling their [cane] out of the fields by bullocks. (laughter)

M: Oh really?

S: Yes. [Niuli'i] Plantation was the only one. And the others--it was terrific. How they ever got horses to pass them, I don't know, because they use this thing now like--I don't know if you know these at all, but long ago in Kansas they had huge old engine sort of things that [they used] when they were going to thresh the wheat. They were just like an engine but they had big, wide, iron wheels so that they could go through mud and everything, and then it hooked up to the threshing machine. Well, I came down here and found the same thing with wagon after wagon after wagon behind them, hauling sugar cane . . .

M: Oh, I've seen pictures of that.

S: . . . down the road to the mill.

M: Yeh.

S: So four of the plantations had these engines but one of the plantations still used bullocks. And all of the overseers and lunas and everybody on the plantation rode a horse. Now they don't have any stables at all anymore because they can drive everywhere. They've put roads up and down the hills and everywhere. You may need four-wheel drives but they can drive all over the plantation. But in those days, even the manager would be out on a horse. So I saw all that change.

M: Yeh. Well, was your office at the hospital?

S: Well actually, you see, there is no place in North Kohala that's called Kohala. North Kohala's a district.

M: Yeh.

S: Yeh. Well, the little town of Kapa'au had the biggest post office, the bank is there--the Bank of Hawaii had been there quite a few years before I came--and the hospital is right there. We used to have the main theater too and old police station.

And you know Kohala is where King Kamehameha the First was born. And they got bottled up somehow or other and ended up with two statues [of Kamehameha], because one was lost overboard in some harbor somewhere or other. And after they got the second one and put it up in Honolulu [in front of Ali'i-o-lani, the State Judiciary Building on King Street], somebody rescued the first one. It's in Kohala at the police station . . .

M: Oh.

S: . . . right across the street from the library. Because that's where he was born. Now that's the way we paint ours. We never paint ours black [like the statue in Honolulu]; we paint it brown. (Lynda laughs) Ready for every June 11th. (laughter) He has his gold coat on, but he isn't black. No Hawaiian was ever black; they're brown.

M: Yeh, yeh.

S: I don't know why Honolulu doesn't buy the right paint. (laughter)

M: Did you work in the hospital part of the time then? I mean did you . . .

S: No. As a public health nurse, I had nothing to do with

the hospital.

M: Oh, I see.

S: Nothing at all.

Another thing that I did to help bring down this very high infant mortality rate--I followed through [on] every baby that was born in the hospital. I went to the home the day it [the baby] went home and gave it its first bath at home.

You know the Board of Health regulation says inspect every baby to be sure that it hasn't a harelip or a club-foot or anything and the mother isn't hiding it. Well, I just didn't know any way to go and say to a mother, "I'm going to inspect your baby." So I told her long before it was delivered, before she went home, "Now I know you [will be] all tired out. How else could you be the first night, because the first night you go home with a new baby it's going to yell all night. So don't worry the next morning. Leave it alone and I'll come in and give it its bath just as quick as I can."

Can't you inspect a baby when you give it a bath? So I never told anybody (laughter) that I was inspecting their baby. I just went and gave them a bath. It was easier to give them a bath--well, you got to take their clothes off and you can do a better job than you can with the clothes on. All the mothers would wait for me and I came in and gave the baby its first bath. And I've had loads of fun. Now all those kids I bathed are through high school and gone, you know; got children of their own. I used to spend my time saying, "Oh, I gave you your first bath." (laughter) So I had my fun out of it.

M: Did you continue this sort of circuit riding around to various places or did people come to you?

S: Well, no. I'm glad to say that I quit just when this got to be a glorified job and the public health nurse sat in her office and they came to her. (laughter) I never minded going to somebody's home. I could go and huhu at them and they'd welcome me with open arms. Even if the sink was full of dirty dishes and I couldn't wash my hands (chuckles), I went and went in. And that was all right with me and it was all right with them.

M: Like what would a typical visit be like? You'd go in and--what were you there for? Did you . . .

S: Well, maybe to give the baby its first bath or to follow up on something else that had happened. We did a good generalized program. We did the tubercular work and the

crippled children's work and all these things.

M: Did a family have to have a particular problem or a reason for your going there?

S: Yes, yes. I visited each school once a week and the teachers would point out whatever [problems] they had noticed to me.

M: Um hmm. How many different schools was that that you went to?

S: Oh, well they got less and less. I can't remember how many. Kohala's only got one now I think. They use part of another old building for some of the classes [that] go over. But I know there were at least seven schools in Kohala. But the children all walked to school in those days. Seven or eight. There was the pineapple company and there was two teachers up there. And down in Mahukona--one teacher I think, if I remember. And then over in Koko-iki was another one. And Hawi. Not before very long they started coming over to Honokaa.

My husband always laughed and said that [when] anybody asked him what his university was he just named one of the schools there in Kohala that only went to the third grade. (laughter) That was the only one school he ever went to clear through and graduated. So the schools were just all along the road especially up to about the sixth grade. And then, well, we had no high school when I went there. The high school--oh my. I can't tell you when they started the high school.

M: What did the kids do when they got out of the elementary then? Did they just . . .

S: Well, the fact is that lots of them used to go just to the sixth grade. They didn't even have--now, say, in Kansas we went to the eighth grade then we went to high school. Lots of kids would drop out at the eighth grade. But no, down here they dropped out at the sixth grade.

My goodness, I got a girl to come and work for me. Of course my daughter was still at home when I started to work so I had a girl just lived in. She was there twenty-four hours out of the day, all except Sunday. We'd take her home to see her folks Saturday night and leave her. And, why, you got the girl right out of the sixth grade. And then you just took her, you had her.

M: Part of the family.

S: They used to love to come because they'd never been any-

where. Why, Mahukona was the landing for Kohala where the interisland boats used to come in. And this girl had been born and brought up on [Niuli'i] Plantation. And I named those plantations right in order across the country. And then on down from Hawi about six miles was this Mahukona. She had never been to Mahukona. She went with us. We went on a picnic down there and she loved it. This was wonderful. It made her quite a kid back home when she went back home on Sunday. (chuckles) She'd been to Mahukona and the rest of the kids hadn't been.

M: Uh huh.

S: If you had a car you could sure get stuck, the roads were so terrible. Because these long trains of sugar cane going down the road, they could stir up foot-deep ruts. You had an awful time driving sometimes. I stranded the Board of Health car more than once. And over in the fields they would be plowing with a bunch of mules. If I honk at them they'd unhook them over there (chuckles) and come pull me through that mudhole. On I'd go. (laughter)

Oh dear. Of course, that was really long ago. It changed, improved a lot, but that was what was there when I went there for quite a while. Boy, it's after two o'clock. Haven't we talked long enough? (laughter)

M: Okay, I'll turn it off. (recorder turned off and on again) . . . how you came to meet Dr. [Steele Fuller] Stewart? [Dr. Stewart, an orthopedic surgeon, was the Chief Surgeon for the Shriner's Hospital for Crippled Children 1942-46.] Was he there for the . . .

S: Oh, no. Why, he came here to Honolulu to run the Shrine Hospital. And they had clinics on all the different islands once a year anyway. And, well like in one of these inspections I did [of] a baby I found a clubfoot. And then probably two, three months later Dr. Stewart came along. Why, I had that mother come in with the baby. Oh, he'd come. I'd have quite a few cases every time. And then probably some of them that they'd had here at Shriner's he'd want to see them again, you see. The fact is we had one little boy that repeated on his clubfoot. I don't know why, but he had two or three trips to Honolulu, because everytime that foot would turn back.

M: Hmm.

S: I suppose it was so mild a thing that maybe he [Dr. Stewart] just treated it with a brace. And then he'd send the child home with shoes and tell him to wear the shoes all the time. Or very often they used to make a brace so that

you put the shoes on the kid at night, let him sleep. But when they'd gone to sleep you could put them [the braces] on. And they would be set this way (demonstrates), with a brace across here.

M: Yeh.

S: Lot of the people--the family—wouldn't use them, you know. I'm sure that's what was the matter with that one case because I only had the one case that repeated. But those people, you could go and talk to them all day but you couldn't get them to do what they ought to do. And the kid'd come home with a pair of shoes and never put them on again.

M: Yeh.

S: Yeh, so that he would go back. But most of the children--we had good success with them. We used to have quite a few all the time.

M: One thing I'm curious about--how much did you make as a public health nurse when you started?

S: Oh, ho ho (laughs). Oh, wonderful salary, very good. I made a hundred and fifty dollars a month.

M: That wasn't too bad then, was it?

S: No, no. At that time that was good.

M: Yeh.

S: Because then we got in the thirties right away. See, it was '29 when I started. And I dropped down to a hundred and seventeen. That was the worst. I think there were two times at least. I was a state [territorial] employee. I think schoolteachers and all the other [territorial] employees--I think we all went down. Then later when finances got better, they did give us some back pay. I never divided it up to see, or ask how many years back or what. But anyway, we got back up. But my goodness, a green girl just out of school starts in and gets more pay than I ever did now.

M: Oh yeh.

S: Much more.

M: Oh yeh.

S: Because even quitting in 1949, I never got too much. (recorder turned off and on again) Oh, yeh. A hundred and fifty dollars a month was good pay.

M: Yeh.

S: Oh, I made my . . .

END OF SIDE 2/1ST TAPE

END OF INTERVIEW

Re-transcribed and edited by Linda I.L. Tubbs

Audited and edited by Katherine B. Allen

NOTE: p. 7 Mrs. Sakai's daughter's full name is Joanne Van Keuren Sakai (Mrs. Albert Eugene) McGinnis.

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THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In May 1971, the Watumull Foundation initiated an Oral History Project.

The project was formally begun on June 24, 1971 when Katherine B. Allen was selected to interview kamaainas and longtime residents of Hawaii in order to preserve their experiences and knowledge. In July, Lynda Mair joined the staff as an interviewer.

During the next seventeen months, eighty-eight persons were interviewed. Most of these taped oral histories were transcribed by November 30, 1972.

Then the project was suspended indefinitely due to the retirement of the foundation's chairman, Ellen Jensen Watumull.

In February 1979, the project was reactivated and Miss Allen was recalled as director and editor.

Three sets of the final transcripts, typed on acid-free Permalife Bond paper, have been deposited respectively in the Archives of Hawaii, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii, and the Cooke Library at Punahou School.